

The Historic Meetinghouse

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Wind Chimes

Nancy Peters, *Harp*, 978-448,5795
Sue Gleason, *Flute*, 978-448-2881

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FLORISTS

Flowers by Stella
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Pinard Garden Center, 978-772-3883
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RECEPTION ENTERTAINMENT

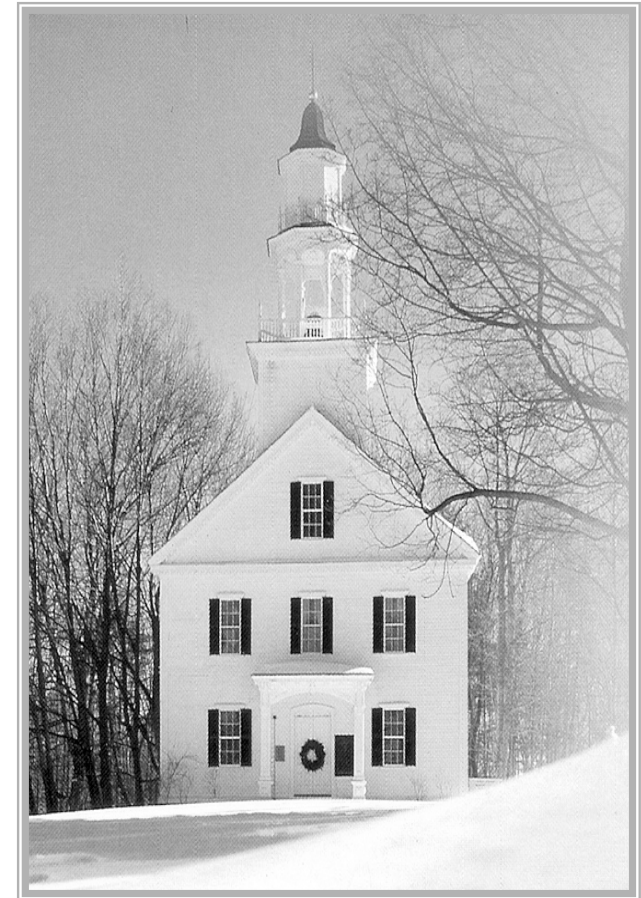
Jeanie Clements, *Curtis Knight Entertainment*
866-667-8910, www.CurtisKnight.com

Greg Vangel, *Disc Jockey*
978-832-6776

RECEPTION HALLS

Bull Run Restaurant, 978-425-4311

The Historic Meetinghouse



On the Common
Shirley, MA

A Brief History of Shirley's Historic Meetinghouse



The first Meetinghouse in Shirley was small and simple. It was built soon after the town's founding in 1753 and was located on Green Lane, off Parker Road. It served both as a place of worship and as a place to conduct town business. As the population grew, a larger, more permanent building was needed.

In 1773, the original 40' X 50' section of the present Meetinghouse was erected in the middle of the Common, where the

Civil War monument now stands. In 1804 a bell tower was added and in later years two side entry porches were attached.

From 1762 – 1819, the Rev. Phineas Whitney was the pastor who helped the new parish grow. The Rev. Seth Chandler served as minister from 1833-1879. Chandler also served as town treasurer, and historian. In the front of the Meetinghouse there are plaques honoring these two leaders. In the lobby there is also a bas-relief plaque honoring Shirley native Oliver Holden who wrote the famous hymn tune "Coronation."

In 1850 the new Shirley Town Hall was completed on the edge of the old Common and several teams of oxen moved the First Parish Meetinghouse to its new site.

For the next one hundred years, the Meetinghouse was used as a church, first by Congregationalists, then by Unitarians. By 1944 there was no longer a congregation actively using the building, so a group of concerned citizens formed the First Parish Meetinghouse Preservation Society. The goal was to preserve the structure as Shirley's oldest public building, and to encourage its continued use.

Since that time, the Meetinghouse has often been used for the town's annual Memorial Day service. For about fifty years the building was used for ecumenical summer worship services. It continues to be used for weddings, funerals, dramatic presentations, concerts, recitals, and programs of historic interest.

Many generous donations have been made to the Meetinghouse over the years. Mrs. John Hancock, wife of the acting governor, presented

a Bible in 1772. The current bell has been in place since it was donated in 1836. In 1847 Henrietta Whitney gave the Stevens Tracker Organ which is still in use today. In the 1970s, Ruth Flager gave the chandelier. In the 1990s money was raised to purchase a baby grand piano for use in recitals and concerts.

In the 1980s major repair work was done on the Meetinghouse steeple and Melvin Longley restored the interior. A plaque in his honor is on the front wall of the Meetinghouse. The large old pulpit was later removed to make more space for weddings and programs. Current fund raising projects are needed to repair the roof and to re-paint the exterior. There are also plans to add heat and restrooms to the building.

To arrange for use of the Meetinghouse, contact Holly Haase at (h) 978-425-0056, or (w) 978-425-2600, ext. 210 or e-mail at hollyhj@juno.com.

The Historic Meetinghouse
On the Common P. O. Box 1426
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